

2011

# Social Media Evaluation

## A Survey of Minnesota Nonprofit Organizations

Sponsored by: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, the Institute for New Media Studies at the University of Minnesota, and the Women's Philanthropic Leadership Circle at the University of Minnesota.



Kristen Cici

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Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)  
University of Minnesota  
330 HHH Center  
301--19th Avenue South  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455  
Phone: (612) 625-1551  
Fax: (612) 626-0273  
E-mail: [cura@umn.edu](mailto:cura@umn.edu)  
Web site: <http://www.cura.umn.edu>

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## Introduction

The past five years have revealed a new era in the United States and around the world – the era of social media. We have seen the rise of social media and its importance in our everyday lives. Because of the popularity and seemingly viral use of social media, nonprofit organizations have begun to invest time and money into using social media tools, often with little to no understanding of the potential impact on their organizations. In fact, a recent survey found that 85.7% of nonprofit organizations use social media, yet only 11% evaluate or measure the impact it has on the organization. Many nonprofits believe that their social media use is positively impacting the organization, but they have no understanding or knowledge in how they can measure this. Additionally, there is little academic research that illustrates how organizations can measure social media.

The importance of this study is made clearer when one combines this lack of understanding of how to evaluate social media with an increasing investment by nonprofits in these social media tools. In fact, 67% of nonprofit organizations invest one quarter to one half of a full-time employee specifically for managing their social networking and half of nonprofits surveyed indicated that they plan to increase employee staffing related to social media in the next 12 months. Aside from staff time, many nonprofits allocate much needed dollars towards social media. The *2010 Nonprofit Social Network Benchmark Report* found that one in five nonprofit organizations plan to increase their spending on social media in the next 12 months. These dollars are being taken from programming needs such as meals for homeless individuals or youth programming – making it critical that social media has a pay off worthwhile of its investment.

In tight financial times, it is vital that nonprofit resources are used in effective places. This leads nonprofit organizations to ask about how they can evaluate their social media efforts. This study sought to address this question and provide insight into how nonprofit organizations use social media and how they are currently evaluating their impact.

## Methodology

The researcher partnered with the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, which provided access to their list of over 5,000 nonprofit professionals for this survey. The Nonprofit Social Media Evaluation Survey was e-mailed to that list on November 8, 2010. As of December 22, 2010, 643 nonprofit organizations had completed the survey.

## Respondent Characteristics

The Nonprofit Social Media Survey was completed by a diverse group of nonprofits representing all different types and sizes of organizations. Human Service nonprofits was most common (34.2%) among respondents. Organization size, measured by annual budget, represented a range of nonprofits with approximately half of respondents (51.2%) having budgets of less than \$1 million and half having budgets over \$1 million (48.8%). Similarly, there was also much variation in the number of employees nonprofits have, with half having over 10 employees and half having 10 or less employees. See Table 1 for full data on respondent characteristics.

*Table 1. Respondent Characteristics*

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Organization Type (n=509)		
Arts and Culture (museums, theaters, cultural centers, preservation societies, etc.)	58	11.4
Association (professional, trade)	15	2.9
Education (higher education, K-12, etc.)	51	10
Environment and Animals	25	4.9
Health and Healthcare (mental health, diseases, disorders, research, etc.)	70	13.8
Human Services (crime and legal, employment, housing, public safety, youth, etc.)	174	34.2
International (foreign affairs, international human rights, diplomacy, etc.)	8	1.6
Public and Societal Benefit (advocacy, civil rights, community organizing, philanthropy, government, etc.)	72	14.1
Religious (religious, spiritual development, etc.)	13	2.6
Other (media, labor union, etc.)	23	4.5
Annual Budget (n = 498)		
Under \$250,000	102	20.5
\$250,001 - \$500,000	73	14.7
\$500,001 - \$1,000,000	80	16.1
\$1,000,001 - \$5,000,000	140	28.1
\$5,000,001 - \$25,000,000	68	13.7
More than \$25,000,000	35	7

**Table 1. Respondent Characteristics Continued**

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Number of Employees (n=510)		
None	19	3.7
1 - 5	137	26.9
6 - 10	86	16.9
11 - 20	82	16.1
21 – 50	68	13.3
Over 51	118	23.1

## Findings

### Social Media Use

The vast majority of nonprofit organizations, 88.8% (541), reported that they use social media in some way. Only 11.2% (68) reported that they do not use social media. Almost all of the nonprofit organizations (87%) agreed that social media is an important tool in their organization. Additionally, 72% of nonprofits indicated that social media has better enabled them to meet their goals.

**Social media** are media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques.

### Organizations Not Using Social Media

Organizations were asked why they did not currently use social media; many of them (32.7%) indicated that their organization's capacity was the greatest barrier to them using social media. Organizations mentioned not having enough staff, financial resources, and technical know-how to begin using social media. One organization explained,

“There are a few reasons: time involved (while this can be streamlined to reduce time spent on social media, the upkeep involved compared to our staffing resources and other duties outweighs the benefit of social media usage), lack of familiarity (most of our board and staff are not that familiar with social media outlets and programs), and prioritization (With having just rebuilt our website and focusing on other tech. items, social media is still awhile down the road). These are probably the largest issues, I don't think we are necessarily NOT planning to use social media, it just isn't a priority in our situation.”

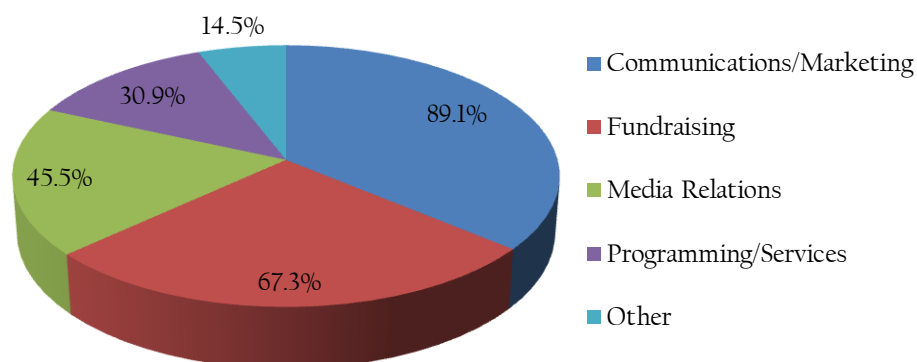
Several organizations also mentioned a lack of understanding of what social media is and how it can be used. A nonprofit clarified, “The leadership in the organization doesn't

understand what it is or what all is involved in it. Also, they see it as ‘something for kids’ so they don't see the value in it.”

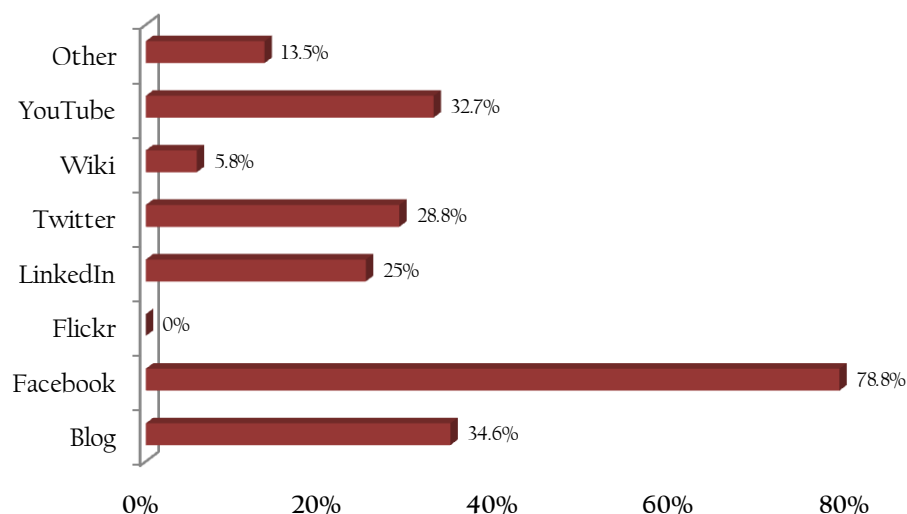
The nonprofit organizations that reported they did not currently use social media were not necessarily unfamiliar with it, or unwilling to use it. In fact, 65.6% (42) of them said they plan to use social media in the future. 34.4% (22) indicated that they do not plan to use social media in the future.

Of those that do plan to use social media in the future, most (89.1%) plan to use it for communications/marketing. Additionally, two thirds (67.3%) plan to use social media in the future for fundraising. The vast majority of nonprofits (78.8%) that are not currently using social media plan to use Facebook for future social media work.

**Graph 1. How nonprofits that are not currently using social media plan to use it.**



**Graph 2. The type of social media that nonprofits not currently using social media plan to use.**

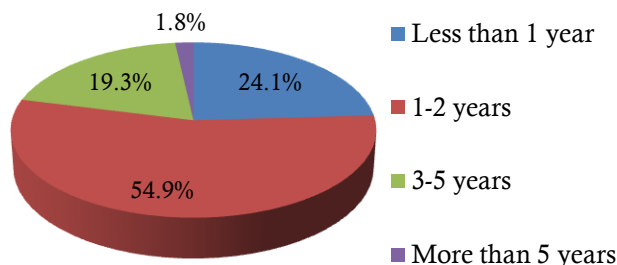


## Organizations Using Social Media

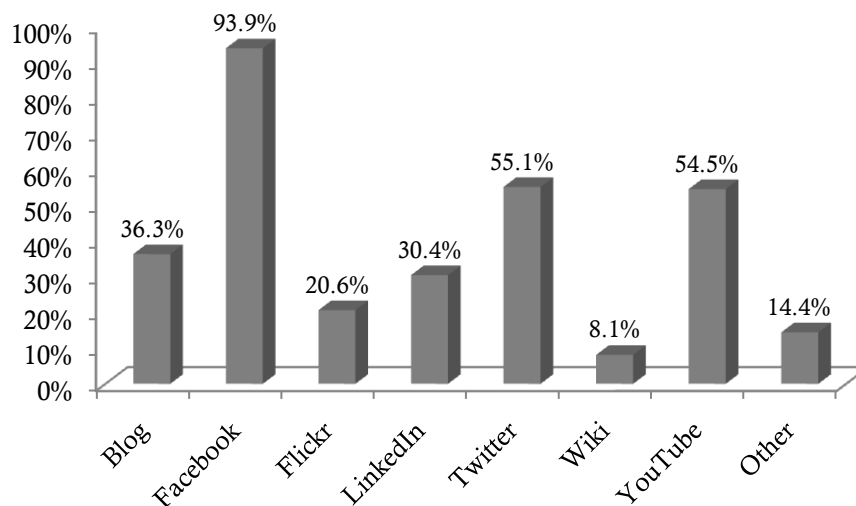
Social media is relatively new for most organizations, with over half of nonprofit organizations (54.9%) have used social media for 1 - 2 years (see Graph 3).

Almost all of the nonprofit organizations (93.9%) reported using Facebook for their social media work. Approximately half of nonprofits also reported using Twitter (55.1%) and YouTube (54.5%). See Graph 4 for the distribution of social media types that nonprofit organizations indicated using. Interestingly, many nonprofit organizations cited forms of “social media” that were not actually “social media.” For example, ten different organizations cited their own organization’s website as the form of “social media” that they use. This illustrated a lack of understanding in some organizations of what exactly social media is.

**Graph 3. Length of time nonprofits have been using social media**



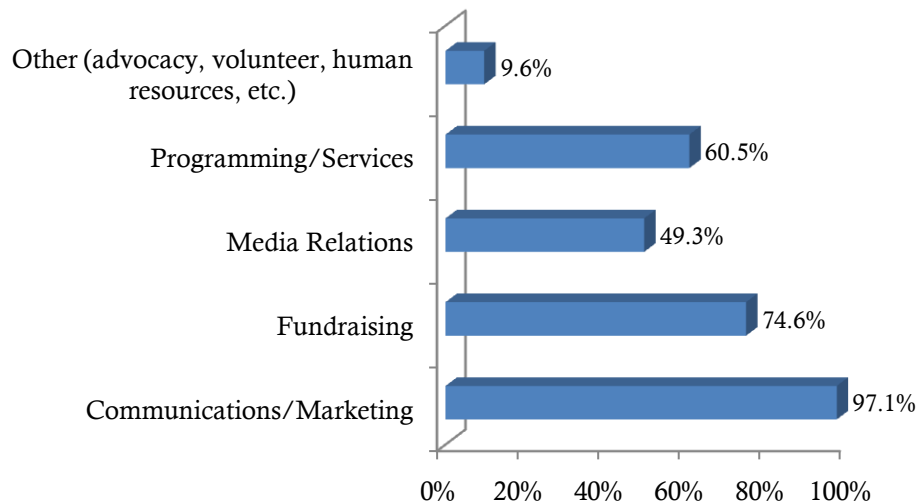
**Graph 4. Types of social media nonprofits are currently using**



Social media is used in every facet of some nonprofits work. Many reported they used social media for fundraising, communications/marketing, and programming/services (see Graph 5). The most common use for social media was communications/marketing, with 97.1% of nonprofits using social media for this work.



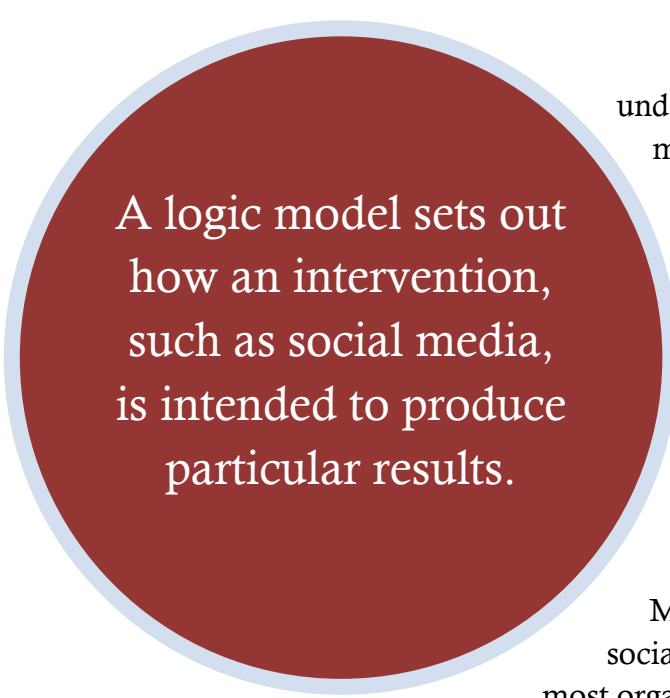
**Graph 5. Area of nonprofit that uses social media**



With social media being such a new phenomenon, it is not surprising that only 11.5% have social media as a line in their organization's budget. This might also be explained by very few organizations spending money on social media. Most organizations (61.8%) reported that their current budget for social media is \$0, 19.1% reported their budget was \$1 - \$500, 7.3% reported their budget was \$501 - \$1,000, 5% reported their budget was \$1,001 - \$5,000, 3.9% reported their budget was \$5,001 - \$25,000, and 3% reported their social media budget was more than \$25,000 per year. Of those that spend more than \$25,000 per year on social media, less than half had a full-time employee specifically dedicated to social media. This leads one to question what the money is being spent on. One likely explanation pertains to the type of social media these high-budget organizations were using. YouTube was used by 69.2% so a possible explanation for the large budgets may be the cost of video production for putting videos on YouTube. Organizations were evenly split on whether they planned to increase spending on social media in the future, 46.7% indicated they did not plan to increase spending and 40% indicated they do plan to increase spending.

With little money budgeted for social media, most nonprofit organizations allocated very little staff time to it. Most commonly, nonprofits allocated less than .25 of a full time employee to social media (71.6%). Some nonprofits (12.3%) did not allocate any staff time to social media. Only 1.8% allocated more than 1 full time employee solely to social media (9.6% allocated .25 - .5 and 4.8% allocated .51 - 1 full time employee to social media).

Nonprofit organizations funded their social media work through several different avenues; reallocating money from programming (20.5%) and reallocating money from another part of the organization (other than programming) (41.5%) were the most common sources of funding. Some organizations did seek outside money to pay for their social media efforts, 5.3% received a grant or donation designated for social media and 6.5% raised additional



A logic model sets out how an intervention, such as social media, is intended to produce particular results.

undesigned revenue specifically to pay for social media. Many nonprofit organizations commented that their social media work is either done by unpaid interns or volunteers, or has been absorbed into their current staff's workload. One organization explained that social media work fell under their job descriptions for "Other job duties as assigned."

### Measuring & Evaluating Social Media

More than half of nonprofits (58.2%) agreed that social media has a strong return on investment. While most organizations use social media, only 32.3% have written goals and/or objectives for their efforts. For those that have goals and/or objectives for their social media efforts, less than half (35.9%) collect information about their progress towards meeting their social media goals and/or objectives.

With only 1/3 of nonprofits having written goals/objectives for their social media efforts, it is not surprisingly that even fewer have a logic model for their social media work. A logic model sets out how an intervention, such as social media, is intended to produce particular results. The vast majority (89.5%) did not have a logic model for their social media efforts.

Surprisingly, almost half (44.2%) of nonprofit organizations indicated they evaluated their social media efforts. This was surprising because most nonprofit organizations indicated that they did not have essential components to evaluating their efforts, written goals/objectives and a logic model. To further delve into their social media evaluations,

\*Outputs are the direct products of program activities, for example: the number of parenting classes you hold for fathers, the number of fathers served, etc. Outputs are not the end goal – they lead to the end goal (or outcome) and often do not explain or indicate the actual impact on those you serve.

\*Outcomes are the actual impacts or benefits for those your program(s) serve, for example: fathers pay more child support, fathers gained knowledge in early childhood learning (knowledge/skills, behaviors, values, etc). It is the outcome – not the output that your program/organization strives to accomplish.

nonprofits were asked to describe their evaluations. Over 250 nonprofits provided descriptions for how they evaluated their social media efforts, but less than 10% were actually evaluating their social media efforts progress towards outcomes. The vast majority indicated that they were “evaluating” their social media efforts by tracking outputs, such as the number of fans they had on Facebook or how many people clicked on a website link. The following, are excerpts of nonprofits explanations of how they evaluate their social media efforts:

- *“We follow site stats and Google trends, track how many applications come in after the application link is clicked, and keep track of how many followers we have on Twitter.”*
- *“We look at the numbers of times links are clicked and the amount of comments facebook posts receive.”*
- *“All we do is informally keep tabs on how many fans we have and if we have people coming to events that were invited via Facebook.”*
- *“Facebook insights and google analytics- basically if we have an increased following.”*
- *“In a rudimentary way. We have a social media component in our strategic plan. We created benchmarks and specific action items (like holding meet-ups and increasing the numbers of likes and follows) related to the plan and measure our progress related to those items.”*

Very few nonprofits are actually measuring whether their social media efforts were making an impact on their organization.

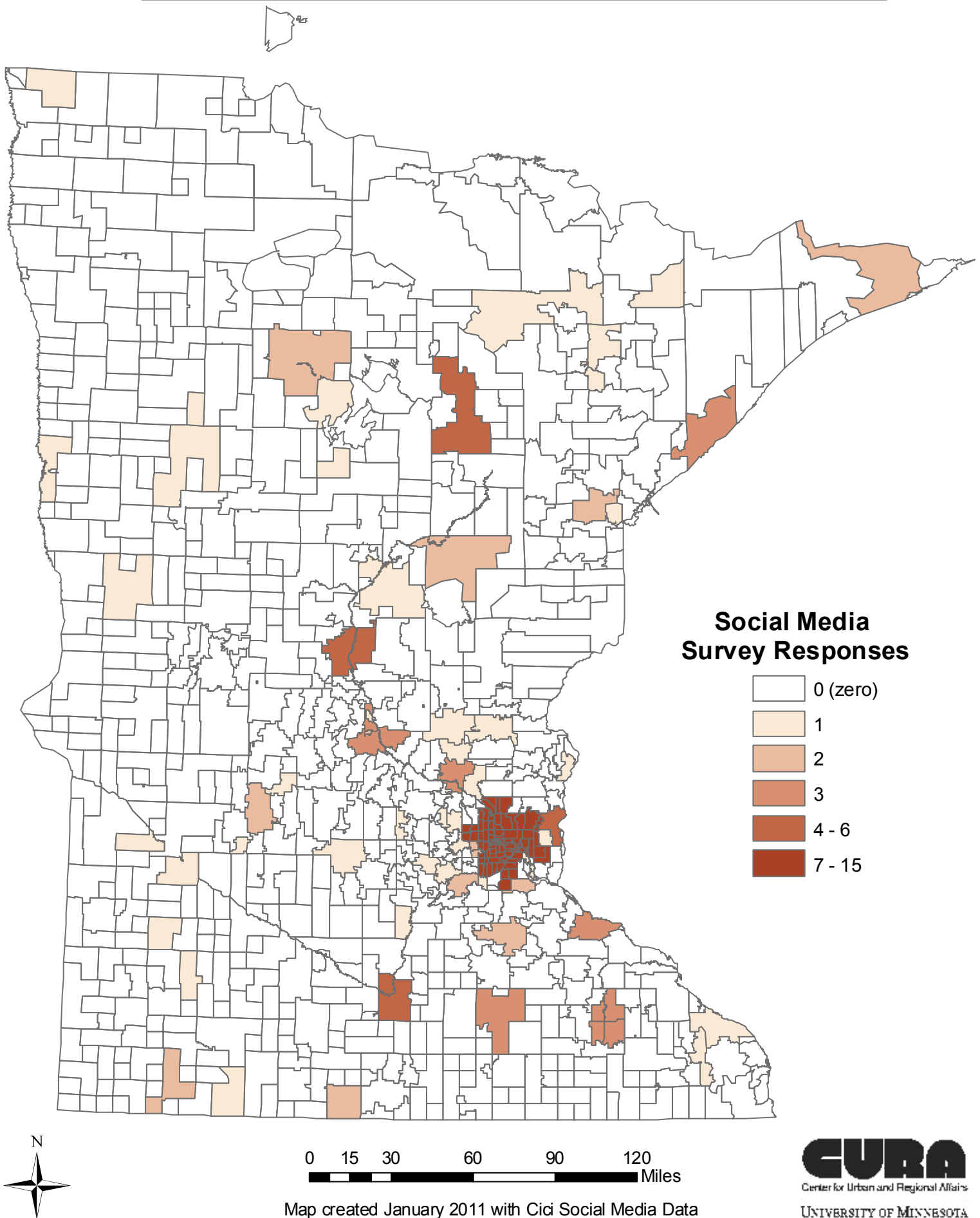
### **Final Thoughts**

Nonprofits are increasingly shifting resources away from other important functions, including direct services (20.5%). This shift makes it increasingly important to ensure that social media is helping nonprofits fulfill their outcomes. Training and education around social media evaluation is clearly necessary.

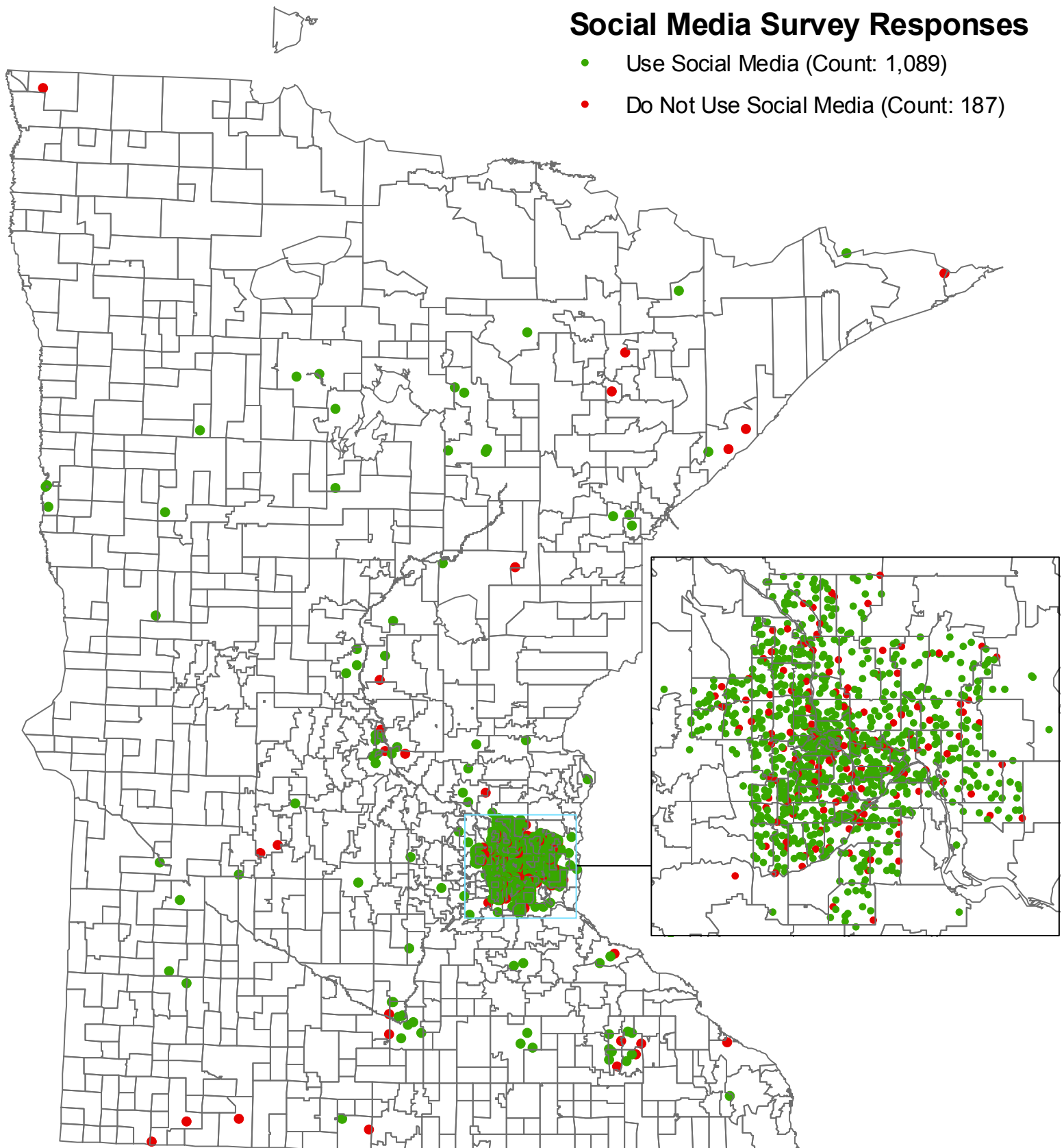
Next steps for this study include:

- Interviews with nonprofit organizations that are currently evaluating their social media efforts to determine smart practices
- In-depth case studies with several nonprofit organizations to gain insight into the effectiveness of their methods
- Comprehensive social media evaluation guide for nonprofits to use to evaluate their social media work

# Map 1. Survey Respondents by Zip Code



## Map 2. Social Media Use by Zip Code

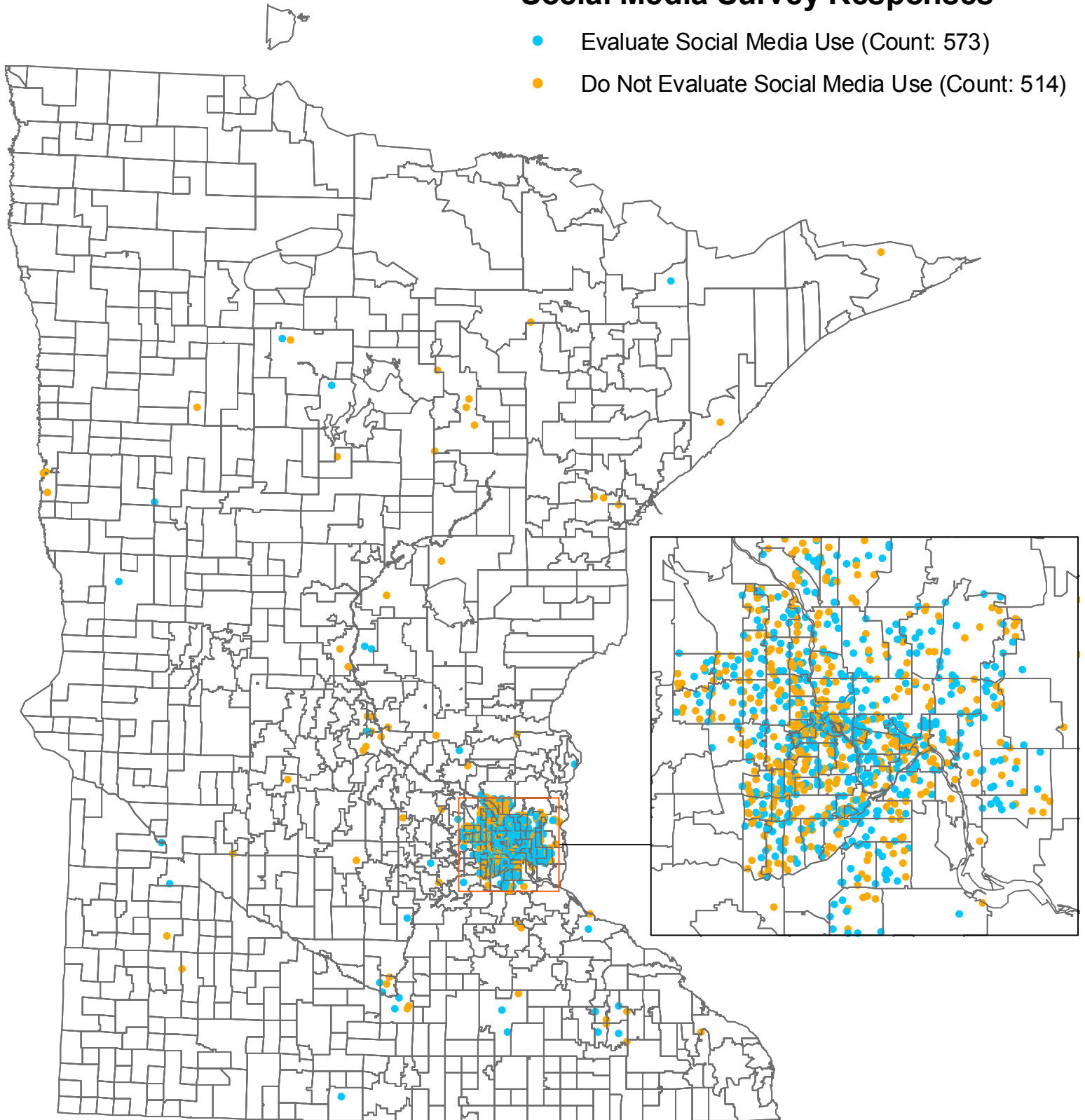


Map created January 2011 with Cici Social Media Data

# Map 3. Social Media Evaluation by Zip Code

## Social Media Survey Responses

- Evaluate Social Media Use (Count: 573)
- Do Not Evaluate Social Media Use (Count: 514)



Map created January 2011 with Cici Social Media Data